

**IN THE CLAIMS:**

Please cancel claims 1 to 12 and add the following new claims:

-- 13. (New) A nucleic acid that encodes an immunoreactive peptide wherein the peptide is homologous with the AA 12 to AA 235 region of *varicella zoster* virus (VZV) VP26 protein.

14. (New) A nucleic acid as described in claim 13, wherein the peptide is at least 37 amino acid residues long.

15. (New) An immunoreactive peptide prepared from the nucleic acid of claim 13.

16. (New) An immunoreactive peptide as described in claim 15, wherein the peptide is recognized by antibodies that are directed against varicella zoster virus (VZV) but not by antibodies that are directed against other herpes viruses.

17. (New) A nucleic acid which corresponds to the nucleotide sequence depicted in Figure 1.

18. (New) A nucleic acid that hybridizes under stringent conditions with a nucleic acid as described in claim 13 and that encodes a peptide, wherein the peptide is recognized by antibodies directed against VZV but not recognized by antibodies that are directed against other herpes viruses.

19. (New) A method for detecting VZV in a sample, the method comprising the steps of contacting a nucleic acid as described in claim 13 with the sample to allow hybridization of the nucleic acid, and determining the presence of nucleic acid hybrid formed.

20. (New) A method for detecting VZV in a sample, the method comprising the steps of contacting a nucleic acid as described in claim 14 with the sample to allow hybridization of the nucleic acid, and determining the presence of nucleic acid hybrid formed.

21. (New) A test kit for detecting VZV, the test kit comprising a nucleic acid as described in claim 13.

22. (New) A test kit for detecting VZV, the test kit comprising a nucleic acid as described in claim 14. --

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